

'The Guardian' weaves love story with thriller

BY KEELY KALESKI
STAFF WRITER

"The Guardian" by Nicholas Sparks is a romance, and a thriller, with a Great Dane named Singer.

"I wanted the love story to be central, it's hard in a thriller" said Sparks who will be in Ann Arbor Tuesday promoting his newest book. "I've read 1,000 thrillers, but this was like inventing the wheel as far as structuring it right."

"The Guardian," he says, is a modern day Greek tragedy.

"There's always a tragedy in my novels," said Singer. "Readers laugh, get angry, frustrated, enjoy and feel the process of falling in love, and they want to cry."

Julie Barenson was a throw-away whose life changed when she met Jim at a diner in Dayton. He helps her get a full-time job at his Aunt Mabel's beauty salon in Swansboro, North Carolina, but didn't seem interested in dating. After lots of shameless hints, he finally got the message and married her. Jim died of a brain tumor a few weeks after their fourth anniversary leaving Julie, then 25, a widow.

On Christmas Eve, 40 days after his death, she gets a surprise delivery - a Great Dane puppy - with a note from Jim promising to be her guardian angel.

Fast forward four years, Julie, now 29, begins dating again. But who should she pick?

Richard Franklin is a consultant on a bridge project in town. He's college-educated, handsome, sophisticated, and takes her to the "Phantom of the Opera" and on a hot-air balloon ride in one weekend. But while she can't put her finger on it, something about Richard makes her uneasy.

Mike Harris was Jim's best friend, and comforted Julie when he died. An all-around nice guy, he's more comfortable

AUTHOR IN TOWN

What: Best-selling author Nicholas Sparks will be signing copies of his newest book, "The Guardian" (Warner Books, April 8, 2003, \$24.95)

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 15

Where: Borders Books & Music, 3527 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor



in jeans than suits, and can "fix practically anything." Mike and his brother Henry own a garage in town. An artist at heart, Mike plays the guitar and writes song lyrics. He's in love with Julie but afraid to ask her out.

Swansboro's a small town where everyone knows everyone else's business. But will they be able to protect Julie when her life turns into a nightmare? You'll have to read the book to find out.

"The Guardian" is Sparks' seventh novel, actually ninth if you count the two that didn't get published.

"I wrote my first novel when I was 19 to see if I could do it," Sparks said. "I never edited it or read it a second time. Then I planned to go to law school, but I didn't get in, so I went on with my life."

He majored in business finance at Notre Dame and graduated with high honors in 1988. A year later he married Catherine, the woman he met on spring break in 1988, and started a family. Sparks worked a variety of jobs, and took up writing again. He wrote a second novel that was also rejected.

His first successful novel, "The Notebook," published in 1996, took six months to write. He spent

another six months editing it before sending out the first draft.

"Message in a Bottle" followed in 1998, "A Walk To Remember" in 1999, "The Rescue," 2000, "A Bend in the Road," 2001, and "Nights in Rodanthe." The movie version of "Message in a Bottle" was released in 1999 and "A Walk To Remember" in January 2002. The film version for "The Notebook" will be released this year, and film rights to "A Bend in the Road" and "Nights in Rodanthe" have been sold. "The Rescue" is being adapted into a TV series.

North Carolina has been his home since 1992, and is the setting for his novels. "I live there and try to keep certain elements the same," he said. As a writer of dramatic fiction, he's drawn to small towns where everyone knows everyone's business and there are no secrets. Places where family, church, and belief in community are important. Of course, you can't overlook beaches, wild horses, and sunsets - which are romantic and also found in North Carolina.

His next book, "The Wedding," is about love and renewal. Look for it this fall.



Bestselling author Nicholas Sparks will be in Ann Arbor on Tuesday to discuss his newest book, "The Guardian."

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